

F I V E
S E R M O N S

O N T H E

F O L L O W I N G S U B J E C T S , V I Z .

T H E T R U E N A T U R E O F T H E C H R I S T I A N C H U R C H ,
A N D T H E
I M P O S S I B I L I T Y O F I T S B E I N G I N D A N G E R .

T H E S C R I P T U R E I D E A O F H E R E S Y .

M Y S T E R I E S M A D E P L A I N .

T H E S C R I P T U R E D O C T R I N E O F A T O N E M E N T .

T H E P L A C E , O B J E C T , A N D M A N N E R O F C H R I S T I A N
W O R S H I P .

By GEORGE ROGERS, M.A.

R E C T O R O F S P R O U G H T O N , I N S U F F O L K , A N D L A T E
F E L L O W O F T R I N I T Y C O L L E G E , C A M B R I D G E .

L O N D O N :

P R I N T E D I N T H E Y E A R M D C C X C I I I .

REV. R. M. O. N. 3

ON THE

FOLLOWING SUBJECTS:

THE TRUE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND

AND THE

IMPOSSIBILITY OF HIS BEING IN DANGER

THE SCIENCE OF THE HUMAN MIND

MYSTERIES MADE PLAIN

THE SCIENTIFIC DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

THE PLACE OF THE HUMAN MIND IN CHRISTIANITY



R. M. O. N. 3

LECTOR OF THE HUMAN MIND IN THE
SCHOOL OF THE HUMAN MIND, CAMBRIDGE

LONDON

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TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND
FREDERICK,
LORD BISHOP OF DERRY.

AMONG the *few* of your Lordship's Ecclesiastical Dignity, who have nobly dared to assert the Rights of Civil and Religious Liberty, and thought no action foreign or unsuitable to their *holy profession*, which could advance the interests of mankind—the Bishops of the see of *Derry* have been the most distinguished; and your Lordship, though last, not least, amongst that *sacred* band.

If I had, therefore, no private favours to acknowledge—no personal esteem or regard to testify, which no one knows to value more highly, or can hold more dear, than myself—I should still look up

to you as the ablest Advocate for that liberty I have claimed, and solicit the sanction of your name to patronize these Discourses.

The purpose for which they were written, will justify this choice.

To dispel from Christianity that dark cloud of *mystery*, which has been so long hanging over it, and to exhibit it in its native dress, in which we see it in the Scriptures, and thus to recommend it to its votaries, and attach them to its service, was the design of this publication.

To effect this, I have exercised the right of private judgment in my Interpretations of the Scriptures, neither presuming to be infallible myself, nor acknowledging that claim in others. I have thus endeavoured to place our Religion upon its only firm and immoveable basis—the Word of God explained by every individual for himself.

Could we once be brought to think, that the worst *Heresy* is a bad life—that no *Church* can be in *Danger*, which has no corruptions in it—that the only *Atonement* for our sins, is Repentance and Amendment—that the *Faith* we ought to contend for is, “*That which was once delivered to the Saints.*” Could we but agree about these *fundamental* parts of our religion, it would matter little, how much we disagreed about the rest. Were those barriers beaten down, which have been kept up, to create distinctions,

tions, and kindle animosities—instead of a *unity of opinion*, which *cannot* be obtained, we might be held together by the only bond that can be lasting, and known by the only mark of distinction that is worth preserving, it being the true *Christian one*—our *love* and good-will towards each other.

The happy effects of this Christian temper, have been widely spread throughout your Lordship's diocese. That liberality of mind and equal regard which you have always shewn to good men of all denominations, has helped to unite the most discordant sects—to soften the rancour which Prejudice and Bigotry had fostered—and as far as it was necessary for every good purpose of society, melted down into a general union, those jarring and dissonant opinions; and made all conspire to promote the happiness of each other; the distinguishing appellations of Catholic, Presbyterian, and Churchman, have all been sunk into the common name of *Christian*. And the only struggle that now subsists between them is, which should give the greatest proofs of their zeal, and their affection to their common-Friend and Patron.

And is it to be wondered at, that such peace and unanimity should now prevail in a city, once the seat of party rage and religious hatred? The citizens alike perceiving, that your differing from any individual in opinion, produced in you no diminution

minution of personal regard for *him*, caught the same liberality of spirit, and were actuated by the same sentiments towards each other. Thus when your Lordship nobly proposed to erect a Chapel for the Roman Catholics of Derry, there was not a Churchman or Sectary, who did not eagerly adopt your *truly* Catholic principle, and contend for the honour of laying the first stone of that edifice*. The *Establishment*, in particular, saw no *Danger* to themselves

* What satisfaction it must have afforded to a liberal mind, to have seen the Bishop of the Diocese, with the Titular Bishop, joined by the Mayor of the Corporation, the Dean of the Cathedral, and the Two Dissenting Ministers, all going in procession to lay the first stone of the Popish Chapel; which is now completed, and affords an example that does honour to the Prelate, and to the citizens that followed it. Blush, ye zealots and bigots, and learn for once a lesson of good-will and Christian charity, from those ye have been taught to hate and to despise.—We have had our procession too in this country, (or rather our *AUTO DA FE*); but it has been of a far different kind from that above-mentioned. It was not indeed *PERSONALLY ATTENDED* by *Bishops* and *Magistrates*, nor was it set on foot with the design of *laying the first stone of any place of worship*; but with the opposite intention of *not leaving one stone upon another* in any religious

selves from performing the offices of friendship and humanity towards the members of a different Communion; nor did they pollute the name of their *Church*, to sanctify Oppression, Violence, and Wrong.

—pudet hæc opprobria nobis

Et dici potuisse, et non potuisse refelli.

Your own liberal example, my Lord, has conspired with the wisdom of the Legislature, which has had no occasion to regret the concession of a full enjoyment of religious rights to the Dissenters of Ireland; as it has found, that the obligation to the discharge of civil duties, has not been lessened, but increased, by such a grant. And let us hope, that the time is coming, when this wise policy will be adopted by every Legislature;—when not only the Protestant Dissenters, but every other class of Christians, will enjoy both their Religious and Civil Rights;—and when the State shall wisely avail itself of the abilities and integrity of every citizen—and
when

religious structure, whose form was not exactly according to the plan laid down by the State. Such is the difference between *building* and *burning*! The one proceeding from the true Christian spirit of benevolence and good-will to all: The other, from the blind and furious rage of persecuting zeal and intolerant bigotry.

DEDICATION.

when active exertions in behalf of Civil and Religious Liberty, will be the only *Test* that remains for a free and happy people to give of their zeal for a country, which merits their attachment, by blessing every virtuous inhabitant with equal and impartial privileges.

I have the honour to be,

My LORD,

With great esteem and regard,

Your LORDSHIP's

Very obliged and obedient

Humble Servant,

GEO. ROGERS.



THE
TRUE NATURE
OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST,
AND THE
IMPOSSIBILITY OF ITS BEING IN
DANGER.

X

THE
TRUE NATURE
OF THE
CHURCH OF CHRIST



IMPOSSIBLE BEING IN

DANGER

MATT. xvi. 18.

Upon this Rock I will build my Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.

OUR Saviour having worked many miracles, in testimony of his divine mission, was willing to learn, whether these proofs had produced their proper effects, by leading men to conclude, that they were certain evidences of his being the Messiah. He asked his Disciples, saying, "Whom do men say, that I, the son of man, am?" He assumes no title above others; but ranks himself with the rest of mankind; with all those who were equally "the sons of men" with himself; and leaves it to them to make the distinction which marked the peculiarity of his character; that they might ascribe it to the works he had performed, and not to any thing naturally superior to others in his person. The answer they made was, "Some say, that thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others Jeremias; or one of the Prophets." However mistaken they were with regard to the exact person of Christ, yet every one agreed in looking upon him as a human
B. being,

being, though endued with authority, and a divine commission. He asks again, "But whom, say ye, that I am?" They had been his constant attendants, had heard his doctrines, and seen his miracles, and were qualified to give a most express answer to this question. Accordingly, Simon Peter answered, and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." *i. e.* Thou art the Messiah, the expected Prophet, that was to come into the world. His being "the Son of the living God" was peculiar to him, in this respect only, that he was highly favoured in having a divine commission given him; and deserved the title in a more eminent degree than others, on account of his exemplary virtue, and perfect obedience to the will of God; for all good men are, in Scripture, stiled "Sons of God," though in a sense inferior to that which is applied to Christ. Peter gave so just a description of the person and character of Christ, that our Lord "answered, and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father, which is in Heaven; and I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my CHURCH, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." That is, Happy are you, that you have formed this opinion of me, and have not taken it up lightly, or from mere report, but have concluded from conviction, that I could not have done the miracles which you have seen, or taught the doctrine

doctrine you have heard, if I had not been commissioned by my heavenly Father to fill the office, and answer the character you have ascribed to me. And this I affirm to you, that the confession of faith which you have now made, and the belief of this single article, of my being the Messiah, is that fundamental truth, on which my religion shall be established; and whatever may be the attempts of its enemies, to prevent its reception in the world, it shall still spread, and finally prevail over all opposition.

This is the evident meaning of the text. But as the use of words without clear and precise ideas annexed to them, gives occasion to the grossest errors, and the most material perversion of the plainest things; and as this effect has been produced in no instance more remarkably, than in the misconception of what is really meant by the word *church*; I shall in the following discourse consider, First, the scripture meaning of that term; and shall, Secondly, shew, that according to our Saviour's declaration, no danger can possibly befall it.

First, The word "Church," in scripture, as well as in profane authors (a), invariably means an "As-

B 2

sembly."

(a) Εκκλησια, amongst the Greeks, meant an Assembly, called together upon any public business, to enact laws &c. Εβουλομην μιν εν, ω Αθηναιοι, τας Εκκλησιας υπο των εφεσηκοτων ορθως διοικεισθαι. Æschines passim.—Θεων Εκκλησια, Deorum concilium, an Assembly of the Gods. Lucian.

sembly." Wherever there was a number of Christians, small or great, collected together, that meeting was called "a church;" and it took its name from the persons who assembled, not the place in which they met. Nor was it any particular order or description of persons amongst them, but the whole body assembled that constituted this "Church." A few instances will serve to prove this. "Salute Priscilla and Aquila, and the church which is in their house (b):" which means a number of persons professing Christianity, in that particular house or family, and has no manner of relation to the place itself where they were assembled; but the persons or family in it are stiled "the church." "No church communicated with me, but ye only (c)." The Apostle addresses himself to the Philippians, as "the church;" remarking the difference between their conduct towards him, and that of others. "Ye are come to the general assembly, and church of the first born (d)." These terms are synonymous, and so they are translated in two passages of the Acts. "The assembly was confused." "He dismissed the assembly (e);" which senses could not be given to the
the

(b) Rom. xvi. 15.

(c) Phil. iv. 15.

(d) Heb. xii. 23.

(e) Acts xix. 32. 40. ἡ ἐκκλησία συγχέχυμένη, ὥστε
λυσε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

the word *church*, supposing it to have been the *place* of meeting. "If the whole church be come together in one place (*f*);" that is, if all the christians of a certain district be assembled together. These and other instances in scripture oblige me to give this construction to the word *ἐκκλησία*. The *congregation*, and not the place, forms the idea of it.

As there was no particular place appointed for these meetings, so neither were there any persons appointed to preside, with any degree of power or authority, over the rest; but a general equality prevailed amongst them. They acknowledged no other superior than Christ. He is stiled, "the Head of the Body, the Church (*g*): that is, the whole society. And to shew the perfect equality that subsisted between the members of it, they are all stiled brethren. "The Head of every man was Christ (*h*)."
He had no other superior in religious matters.—The Apostles themselves enjoyed no power but what related to their divine mission; the power of working miracles, of prophesying, and speaking with tongues. And even these powers were imparted, by the Apostles, to all christians in general, and were not confined to any particular order amongst them. Stephen (*i*), who was chosen by the congregation to the menial office of serving tables, preached,

B 3

" and

(*f*) 1 Cor. xiv. 23.(*g*) Coloss. i. 18.(*h*) 1 Cor. xi. 3.(*i*) Acts vi. 5. 8.

“ and did great wonders and miracles among the people.” The qualifications required of those who were to fill the most important offices in the church, were age, piety, and prudence ; and as far as the powers of persuasion, example, and gravity could go, they might exercise them to the full : but supremacy and spiritual dominion they had none ; and where the interests of the gospel were not immediately concerned, the Apostles and Elders had no more power than private christians. If an offence was committed by one christian against another, and the matter could not be settled privately, or by the friendly interference of one or two others, the church itself, that is, the whole assembly of christians, was consulted in the last resort (*k*). “ If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church.” If he did not submit to this decision, he was excluded the society, which was the whole of their excommunication. The rules relating to this discipline, amounted to little more than a direction not to keep bad company ; and the great bond of union which held this society together, was love and charity.

This is the account we have of the church which Christ established ; which, for its piety and simplicity, may well deserve our admiration. And if a comparison were drawn between *it* and modern churches, the utility and advantages it possesses,
above

(*k*) Matt. xviii. 17.

above those human institutions ; nay, I had almost said, its direct opposition to them all, would be too conspicuous to be dissembled. There was no stress laid upon the place where christians should meet, nor any intimation given, that one sort of edifice was more proper than another to assemble in, for the worship of God ; a peculiarity, which with some people, enters very much into their idea of a true church, and of the efficacy of their prayers offered up in it. All were invited into it, without any discrimination of sect or party, gentile as well as jew. " Preach the gospel to every creature (*l*)," was the commission, and the terms were as plain : " He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved," The conditions of admission into a church, at this time, are not so easy. Many things are required to be believed, which are not in the gospel, before a person is allowed to enter into it. It cannot therefore be " preached to every creature " in that unlimited degree it was ordered, as there are many who refuse to receive it, on account of those other articles of faith which have been superadded to it. There was no distinct order of men who had exclusively appropriated to themselves the denomination of the church, or what we now call the clergy. But " unto every believer was given grace, according to " the measure of the gift of Christ (*m*). " In greater degree

(*l*) Mark xvi. 15. 16.

(*m*) Ephes. iv. 7. 11. 12. 1 Cor. xii. 7. 11.

degree indeed to some than to others ; and for the sole purpose “ of perfecting the saints for the work of “ the ministry, for the edification of the body of “ Christ ;” not to be lords over the faith of others, or to exercise a spiritual supremacy. We read indeed of Elders and Bishops, or Overseers, who were to inspect the conduct of their christian converts, and who, from their age were fittest to add the force of example to the piety of their precepts. And these venerable teachers are described under the image of shepherds and guides ; offices in themselves, low and humble, but sanctified by the use they were to make of them ; which was to secure their followers from error, and lead them into the way of truth ; not to blind their eyes and shut out the light of their understandings, and then make them believe that they were in the right path. The Apostles, and first preachers, undertook a burthen, not an office of power and authority ; they were better and poorer than other people, not their lords and masters. The officers which are now supposed necessary to constitute a church, vastly exceed those of the primitive one in number, and fall as much short of them in point of utility (*n*). Nor was the discipline of the church

(*n*) In our common idea of the English church, the body of the people is hardly included. It is supposed to consist of the King, as supreme head ; of Archbishops,

church of Christ exercised with any severity. "The delivery of men over to Satan (*o*)," was by no means a consigning them to the punishment of the damned in the next world, after having tortured them to death in this. Amendment, not their destruction, was the object. It was done, that they "might learn" not "to speak ill" of religion, which was of so holy a nature, as not to admit a bad man into it. And these persons whom the Apostle speaks of, were of the most abandoned cast; apostates; men who had both sacrificed their faith and conscience, and become such a disgrace to their calling, that they were fit only to associate with the profligate and immoral; with those who were "enemies" to the gospel, and its greatest "opposers." "This delivering over to Satan," is very different from delivering over to the civil magistrate and the executioner; and if they had not "made shipwreck of a good conscience, (*p*)," as well as their "faith," they would not have been treated as bad men, but as mistaken

bishops, Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Deans, Archdeacons, Convocations, Chancellors, Treasurers, Præcentors, Prebendaries, Canons, Petty Canons, Rectors, Vicars, Curates, Chaplains, Choristers, Organists, Parish Clerks, Vergers, Sextons, &c. Vide Robertson's Attempt to explain the words Reason, Substance, &c. p. 171.

(*o*) 1 Tim. i. 19. 20.

(*p*) 1 Tim. i. 19.

taken ones. The infliction of tortures, and death, in all its hideous forms, for a want of faith, in what reason cannot comprehend, or for entertaining a doubt about the authority which imposes such a belief, was a refinement in cruelty reserved for later ages of the church. The apostles and first christians had learned a better lesson from their master, "who came not to destroy mens' lives, but to save them (q)." And this he said, when his disciples wanted him "to call down fire from heaven" to consume those *dissenters* and *heretics*, the Samaritans (r): he told them "they knew not what the true spirit of their religion was;" that it breathed nothing but love and charity, and embraced all mankind, as brethren; and that no difference of worship, or of religious opinion, ought to abate their good will, or lessen their good actions, one towards another.

Having considered the scripture meaning of the word "church," I shall secondly shew, that according to our saviour's declaration, no "danger" can possibly befall it.

Had all other churches been built with the same materials with the "church of Christ," there would never have been any complaint about their decay, or apprehensions for their fall. That Jesus was the "Christ" "the son of the living God," was the "rock upon which the church of Christ was built."

It

(q) Luke ix. 57.

(r) Luke ix. 54.

It has withstood the ravages of time, the violence of the floods, and the fury of the storms that have beaten upon it; and nothing has been able to shake it, for it was founded upon a "rock (*s*)."^(s) Other churches have since been said to be constructed upon this model; but the danger they are now in, from the decayed state of them, plainly proves that they were built upon a very different foundation. The apostle tells us, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid," which is "Jesus Christ." Now it is certain, an attempt has been made to lay a very different foundation, and to build upon it. Several other propositions, quite contrary to christianity, and destructive of it, are deemed its fundamental truths; but as they are neither agreeable to reason, nor the word of God, it cannot be expected they should have his power or sanction to support them. The foundation that is laid by the "apostles and prophets" will remain firm and unmoveable; but "if any man build upon this foundation, wood, hay, stubble, his work shall be made manifest; the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (*t*)."^(t) Wherever the fictions of men shall be substituted for the word of God, or a motley mixture of absurd and unscriptural doctrines shall be super-added to it, it shall plainly appear "whose work it is."

(*s*) Luke vi. 48.

(*t*) 1 Cor. iii. 11. 12. 13.

is." Revelation and mystery—light and darkness, are so opposite to each other, that if men are suffered to use their reason and senses, they never can be under a mistake about them; and when once they shall exercise their faculties in the search after truth, and bring their opinions to their only test, the scriptures—then will come the fiery trial to the hay, wood, and stubble—to the whole fabric of error, which has been building for ages, and will pass away like a vision. Such an antichristian church as this, must ever be *in danger*; and no wonder that the members of it are in such constant alarms about it. If any worldly power could procure it aid, it has every security which that can give. Large revenues are allotted to its defence, and every allurements held out to those who will engage in its service. It is guarded by restrictions, fenced in by pains and penalties, and is by LAW ESTABLISHED. With all these supports, still it is *in danger*, and ever crying out for help. Sure this betrays some very great weakness within, as it is so well defended from without! Great is the power of the civil magistrate, but no power can make a proposition true, which is in itself false; or maintain, by force, the reasonableness of injudicious laws. He may silence the voice of truth, but is not able wholly to *stifle* it. He may bribe men to *profess* the grossest contradiction—but no authority can insist upon their *believing* it. Most human establishments of religion have been productive

ductive of sloth, ignorance, and hypocrisy in its professors—cramping the best faculties of the mind, and enslaving it to priestcraft and folly. The religion of Christ stands in no need of such assistance, and can support itself by its own strength, and its own evidences. It not only made its way in the world, at its first promulgation, without the aid of the civil power, but in opposition to it; and this at a time when it was preached by a few poor, friendless, and illiterate fishermen. These first preachers had no rewards to distribute, no honours to bestow; nothing to interest their followers, or retain them in their cause. On the contrary, bonds, imprisonment, and death, were their certain portion. Yet notwithstanding all these discouragements, they went forth to the conflict, with no other armour than truth, and no other comfort than a good conscience. With these, in a short time, they overcame the prejudices of the Jews, the idolatry of the Gentiles, and effected a revolution in religion, when every power in this world was combined to crush it. Could natural means have produced so sudden and so wonderful a convulsion? No; the same power that first gave rise to christianity, continued to support it. But it has met with opposition, not only from open enemies, but false friends; and the latter have done it more disservice than the former; under pretence of what they have called establishing, they have helped to undermine it, and destroy its efficacy; and in order

to improve what was already perfect, they have added such errors and corruptions, as are a scandal and disgrace to it. And as men are fonder of their own inventions than they are of truth, they have guarded these fictions with more care and jealousy, than they have the vital principles of the gospel. These unsubstantial doctrines being in danger from the weakest attack, the approach to them is diligently watched, and no less rigorous injunctions given to prevent a surprise, than were by Moses to the Israelites, to keep them from Mount Sinai : “ Thou shalt set bounds unto the people, round about, saying, take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the Mount, or touch the border of it, whosoever shall touch the Mount shall be *surely put to death* (v).” Thus exposed as christianity has been to the assaults of its open enemies, and the misguided zeal of its false friends ; it has still surmounted all difficulties, has even gained strength by opposition, and proved the truth of our Saviour’s prediction, “ that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

From what has been said, these conclusions naturally follow :

First, Before we complain of the church being *in danger*, we should consider well what church we mean. If it be the “church of Christ,” our fears are vain ; for we are assured by our Lord himself,

no

no danger shall befall it. But if we be anxious for any other church, our fears are too well founded ; and there is no way to remove them, but by making it as like the former as possible, both in discipline and doctrine ; and holding the same confession of faith, which was so much applauded by our Saviour ; which was only this, " That Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God."

Secondly, As Christ declared, that " his kingdom was not of this world," it is impossible that " his church" can form any alliance with it. It must be a wonderful conversion, and a long time must elapse before that great prophecy will be fulfilled, " when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ (x)." Hitherto there has been so little agreement between them, that as well might there be, " a concord of Christ with Belial," or truth with fable, as a junction formed betwixt them. For, so unlike is the " faith once delivered to the saints," to that which Constantine enjoined, that if any thing could have ruined christianity, it was the establishment of what passed under that name by the powers of this world. It is an insult to suppose, that divine power can stand in need of human aid.

Lastly, The truest Friends to the church, are those who would restore it to its original purity and simplicity. That " being rooted and built up in a

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" holy

(x) Rev. xi. 15.

“ holy faith” they may “ present it a glorious
“ church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such
“ thing, but be holy and without blemish (y).”
And when this is done, and not before, it may bid
defiance to every enemy, and assure itself, “ that the
“ gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.”

To the King, eternal, immortal, invisible; the
only wise God, be ascribed honor and glory,
now and for ever.

(y) Coloss. ii. 7.



THE
SCRIPTURE IDEA
OF
HERESY.



ACTS xxiv. 14. 15. 16.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call Heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets; and have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; and herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence, toward God, and toward men.

IT was the fate of christianity itself, at its first promulgation, to be branded with the name of *heresy*; and its preacher, St. Paul, was called the great *heresiarch*, “a ringleader of the *heresy* of the Nazarenes,” for so the term should be translated in the 5th, as it is in the 14th verse of this chapter.

The word *Heresy*, in the original, is in itself a term of no criminal import. It means no more than a *choice*; as when different religious opinions are proposed to the mind, it “*chuses*” and embraces those which appear most true and convincing. According to this interpretation, there can be nothing wrong,

wrong, or criminal, in heresy; it being nothing more than the exercise of the mind upon subjects which deserve most to employ it. Nor do we find, that it had an ill name given to it, in scripture, but when accompanied with vice, and when opinions were maintained, more for the purpose of justifying wickedness than the support of truth.

The Pharisees, among the Jews, were a religious sect, or heresy; and though many individuals of this profession were justly branded by our Lord, with the title of "hypocrites;" though they held the tradition of the elders, and rejected the commandments of God; yet, notwithstanding, we find an example of a virtuous character declaring himself a member of this suspicious community; and informing us, that after the strictest sect (heresy) of the Jewish religion he lived a Pharisee. (Acts xxvi. 5.) The Sadducees formed another sect, whose general tenor of practice and conversation, was nearly as reprehensible as that of the former. These heretics are frequently classed together; and the disciples of Christ are warned against the doctrine of both. But we may remark, that although the particular opinions of the Sadducees were of the most dangerous nature, and such as struck at the root of all religion, by denying the resurrection of the dead; yet our Saviour, in his reasoning with them upon this subject, only told them that they were mistaken, and that "they erred, not knowing;" that is, "not understanding the
" scriptures,

“scriptures, nor the power of God.” He “denounces no woe” against them, as he frequently did against the Pharisees, for their hypocrisy; but “reasons” with them out of the scriptures, and proves to them, the truth of what they before had denied. This instance of lenity must have proceeded from a distinction which our Lord made, between a mistake about the sense and meaning of certain passages of scripture, and a breach of the plain and positive commands of God, where there could be no mistake at all. And the treatment these heretics met with from our Lord, may serve as a lesson to bigots and persecutors. No hard names, nor ill language were given them. They were not threatened with fines, confiscations, and imprisonment, to make them retract their errors; but much likelier means were made use of; reason and argument; gentleness and good-nature. They were treated as men under a mistake, whose errors might be involuntary; and the issues, perhaps, only of unfortunate inquiry. They might deserve compassion, but not ill-usage; for where there is no crime, there certainly ought to be no punishment.

In all other places of scripture where heresy is spoken of with disgrace, it is always on account of the evil practices, and not the opinions, of those who were charged with it; in the epistle to the Galatians, (v. 20.) it is reckoned amongst the
works.

works of the flesh, " seditions, heresies (a), envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like, and they who *do* such things, are told, " that they shall not inherit the kingdom of God." They were excluded from the kingdom of God, for the bad *actions* which they *did*, not the wrong opinions they maintained. St. Peter (1 Ep. ii. 1.) foretells, " that false teachers would come, who would bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." That they were not only apostates, but such as were sunk in the grossest vices, is plain from the description given of them in this chapter. The Apostle says, that many shall follow their *pernicious ways*, or lewd practices (b): and that God will punish *them* for their wicked deeds, in the same remarkable manner, as he did the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

St. Paul directs Titus (iii. 10.) " to reject a man, that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition:" and subjoins, as a reason for this proceeding,

(a) In this place it is possible the word may mean *parties in the state*, or, *in temporal matters*; as it is joined with *seditions*, or *dissentions*. τοὺς πολιτευομένους μίαισθαι πρὸς τὴν Ῥωμαίων ΑΙΡΕΣΙΝ. Polyb. apud Raphel. Gal. i. 6.

(b) Or *filthiness*; for many ancient copies, the King's MS. and that in Magdalen College, Oxford, read *ασιλγυας*, Vide Hammond.

ceeding, "Knowing that he that is such, is subverted, and sinneth; being condemned of himself."

This is the character of an immoral member of the christian society, who, by being conscious of his having departed from the rules of it, must himself approve of the sentence passed upon him; it has plainly this meaning and no other. For the Apostle, in the verses before, had been recommending an exemplary behaviour in believers; that they should be careful to excell all others (*c*) in good works; as such a conduct would be useful and serviceable, but that foolish questions, and contentions, were unprofitable and vain; and that the heretic, whom he was to reject, was one, who was subverted, was turned out of the way (*d*), wherein he should have walked, and had sinned, and so become a disgrace to their society, and ought to be expelled from it.

Thus it appears, that heresy, according to the scripture notion, being not a pure mistake of judgment, but an embracing of doctrine known to be false by those who espouse it, out of disgust, pride, or envy, or from worldly principles, or to avoid persecution, or trouble in the flesh, may be well ranked
among

(*c*) *καλῶν ἔργων προεῖσθαι*, *præesse*, to be at the head of good works, *προϊσθαι τῶν πραγμάτων—της ηγεμονίας*. Demosth.

(*d*) *Εξεστραπται*.

among carnal lusts. Hence, are such men said, "not to serve Jesus Christ, but their belly, (Rom. xvi. 18.) to teach what they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Tit. i. 11.) to account gain for godliness (1 Tim. vi. 5.) and through covetousness, with feigned words, to make merchandize of others." (2 Pet. ii. 3.) And therefore the Apostle doth not advise us, to convince, but only to admonish, and reject the heretic, as knowing that he sins, being convicted by his own conscience (*e*). And where hereby is not taken up to serve bad purposes, and bad passions, and is not persisted in from a spirit of pride, strife, and contention, but from a laudable opposition to gross errors, and bad practices: there it is spoken of with commendation in the holy scriptures. St. Paul, hearing of some divisions in the church of Corinth, about the celebration of the Lord's supper, writes to them to prevent the irregularities of behaviour which had taken place there; and tells them, that those who had a proper sense of their duty, and that sacred ordinance, should withdraw themselves from such as had not: that by thus forming themselves into a select and separate body, they might observe such order and decency, as would be rendered conspicuous to all the rest: that singularity in a good cause was a virtue, and that they ought to be proud of a distinction, when any good might be gained by it.

(*e*) See Whitby on Gal. v. 19. quoted Jebb's Works, ii. 148.

it. "For there *must* be even *heresies*," says he, "amongst you, that they, which are approved," that is, men of approved virtue, and who will stand the test, "may be made manifest among you." And that this never could be done, but by forming a separation, and opposing good example to bad, in order to put a stop to the abuses complained of. Here the heretics were the best part of the congregation: not the leading party, who had behaved amiss; from whom the conscientious were ordered to divide and separate, that they might manifest their integrity.

Having examined the word "heresy," and seen in what sense it is used in scripture, we are not to wonder, that St. Paul was not at all startled at being charged with it. They had not yet begun to fulminate anathemas against those who dared to think for themselves, nor were the terrors of an inquisition held out to such obstinate offenders. This intolerance was reserved for a later age. So long as our apostle knew that the Jews could prove nothing criminal against him, and his conscience told him that he had been guilty of no offence, either against God or man, he held in contempt their accusation of being a ring-leader of the heresy of the Nazarenes; and with a spirit and courage, that truth and innocence inspires, openly declared to the Roman governors, that if to be a christian was an heretic, an heretic certainly he was; but adds, that his accusers were not aware,

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that

that by making him one, they had in a great measure included themselves under the same predicament. " For, says he, after the way which they call *heresy*, so worship I the God of my fathers." No *new object* of worship is introduced ; the *same* common parent of mankind ; the *same almighty Being*, to whom our nation owes such distinguished marks of favour and protection. He is equally the God of *Christians* and of Jews ; and all that he requires of either is " that they should worship him, in spirit and in truth." Whatsoever is written in the law, and the prophets, is equally the object of the faith of both ; and the expectation, which the Jews indulge, of a resurrection of the dead, and a future recompence of reward ; the same hope is the basis of a christian's creed, and the *distinguishing* article of his religion ; that in this latter instance, the difference did not respect the object but the degree of faith : for what the one only hoped for, as relying upon the goodness of God, the other was fully assured of, by his having raised up Christ from the dead.

This was St. Paul's confession of faith, which he made before the Roman governors, upon a charge of heresy brought against him by the Jews. It was thought a full and satisfactory defence by the civil power, and ought to have silenced his accusers, if piety, worth, and virtue could have expiated the offence of differing from them in opinion. It is a short formulary of faith, which the apostle has given

us ; it consists of but few articles, and those very plain and intelligible ; no one who maintains the doctrines contained in it, ought to be charged with heresy, according to the modern acceptation of the term ; and if he is, he may shelter himself under the name and authority of St. Paul, who very frankly confessed, that what his enemies stiled heretical, he considered as the true religion. And what this is, it is well worth our remarking. First, Christianity has made no alteration in the object of divine worship. " Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, is *one* Lord," is a truth equally insisted on by the christian as well as jewish lawgiver. Our Saviour, in answer to the scribe, says, that the *first* of all the commandments, was that which related to the *unity* of the Supreme Being ; and as this was one of the first precepts of the moral law, his declaration concerning it, confirms and ratifies the truth of it ; for he came not, he said, to relax their duty in this respect, but to strengthen, and give weight to their former obligations. It is on this foundation, that the apostle Paul, builds the faith of a christian : " To us, says he, there is but *one* God, the *Father*," whom, in another place, he stiles, " the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *Father* of glory." The unity, and supremacy of God, is a truth of that magnitude and importance, that the whole jewish dispensation, was framed to establish it. To imagine that another dispensation, or what indeed was only an extension of

the former, should unsettle, or undo, what was the original and grand design of it, is to ascribe weakness and uncertainty to him “with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.” This is a truth which falls in with our first, and natural conceptions of things: is what reason loudly proclaims, from the apparent unity of design throughout all the works of God; and is an idea, which never can be wholly shut out of the mind, till it has been debauched by metaphysical jargon, and the refinements of false philosophy. Predicting the errors of an apostate church, the prophet Daniel (*f*) informs us, that an heathen potentate (the Roman emperor) should forsake the objects of his father’s worship; should adopt a *strange God*,—expressly distinguished from the God of Gods,—a God unknown to his heathen ancestors,—though as far as related to divine adoration, equally an idol with what they had before worshipped; and honour him, not in spirit and in truth, but with gold and with silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. This is adding to, or substituting another deity instead of that God who made heaven and earth, the God of Jesus and of Paul, whom alone men ought to worship, and expressly contradicts the command of both covenants.

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(*f*) Dan. xi. 36. 38. See Commentaries and Essays published by the Society for promoting the knowledge of the Scriptures. Vol. i. p. 486.

The next truth of importance we learn from St. Paul's defence, is a belief in the holy scriptures, and that fundamental article, which is there found, a resurrection of the dead ; it is to this that the law and the prophets evidently point, viz. to the coming of the Messiah, and the doctrine he should deliver. And what is it, that he principally teaches us ? Why, that he has brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel. It was this truth, that the apostle principally urges in his discourses. He says, " that he was commanded to preach unto the people, and to testify, that Christ was ordained of God, to be the judge of quick and dead ; to whom gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him, shall receive the remission of sins." And in another place, " if thou shalt confess with thy mouth, the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." In expectation of this great event, and preparatory to it, we are taught in the gospel, " to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

To conclude : A belief in one God ;—in the truth of the holy scriptures ;—and in a judgment to come, is the substance of a christian's creed. To fabricate any other doctrines, and make them of equal importance with these, is to lessen the authority, and

sufficiency of the scriptures; and to require belief to these supplementary doctrines, whether it is done by the mandate of the pope, or any other person, is to exercise a power, which no person has a right to, and which a protestant would disown and resist, referring the decision of the dispute to a higher authority, to the bible, as his only rule of faith, and if branded as a heretic for so doing, he would not deny the charge, but boldly confess, "that after the way which they called heresy, so worshipped he the God of his fathers, believing all things which are written in the holy scriptures; and that he had hope towards God, that there would be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." And if this confession of faith did not satisfy his accusers, it would himself, provided he "always exercised himself, to have a conscience void of offence, towards God, and towards men."

To the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, God only wise: be ascribed all honour, power, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for ever.



MYSTERIES

MADE PLAIN.

PREACHED AT SPROUGHTON

On TRINITY SUNDAY,

JUNE 19, 1791.



EPHES. vi. 19, 20.

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the Mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an Ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.

IT has long been a received opinion, that there are certain *Mysteries* in the Christian religion, so far above human comprehension, that it would be in vain to enquire into their meaning; and so sacred and sublime, that it would be profane even to attempt it.

That these are very different from the mysteries which we read of in the scriptures is certain: for the latter are always spoken of as things capable of explanation, and which are all actually explained; nor do the sacred writers condemn an inquiry into their meaning, as an unlawful and unbecoming curiosity, but assert the contrary; and consider it, as the duty of a christian minister, "to *make them known*," and divulge them. St. Paul wanted only
"liberty

"*liberty of speech (a)*, to unfold "*the mysteries of the gospel*," and shew the reasonableness of it; and perhaps all that is now wanted, is the same liberty to shew the unreasonableness of all other *mysteries* which are *not* in the gospel.

I shall, in the following discourse, First, endeavour to prove, that there are *no mysteries* in the gospel but such as are revealed.

And, Secondly, that when christianity is said to be *mysterious*, the true nature of it is misrepresented.

First, In those instances where our Lord couched his meaning under figurative expressions, and intended that his disciples only should comprehend the full import of what he said, he uses the word *mystery* as synonymous to *parable*, as appears from St. Mark, and the parallel places (*b*). "Unto you it is given to *know* the *mystery* of the kingdom of God;" which is afterwards explained, by his saying, "*Know ye not this parable (c)*."

But in the writings of the apostles, the word is generally applied to the calling of the gentiles into the church and kingdom of God; an event which the Jews had no conception of; as they imagine that the partial favours of heaven were to be confined to their own nation; and that, from long pre-
scription,

(*a*) Παρηγοια.

(*b*) Mark iv. 11. Matt. xiii. 11. Luke viii. 10.

(*c*) Mark iv. 13.

scription, they had an exclusive right to them (*d*). But this mystery or secret, which had lain *hid*, in the councils of God, the apostles "*made known*," and proclaimed to the world. A few instances will evince this.

St. Paul says (*e*), that "God had by revelation, "*made known* unto him the mystery, of which he "had written before in few words, whereby they "might understand his *knowledge* in the mystery of "Christ; which, in other ages, was not made "known unto the sons of men, as it was then revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the "spirit

(*d*) The first and leading sense of *μυστήριον*, says the learned Dr. Campbell, "is not that of the English "word *mystery*, i. e. something incomprehensible by "reason, but *arcanum*, a secret. It is adopted by the "septuagint as a term strictly corresponding with "the Chaldaic *ܐܪܥܢܐ* *res arcana*. Nor is it confined to "divine secrets. St. Paul tells us, that the mystery "of iniquity doth already work; i. e. the spirit of "antichrist hath begun to operate, but the operation "is latent and unperceived. The gospel of Christ "is denominated a mystery, not because it contains "any thing in its own nature dark and incomprehensible, but because it treats of something that had "been concealed for ages, but which was at length "openly revealed." Vide *Essays Philosophical, Historical, and literary*, 1st. vol. p. 431.

(*e*) Ephes. iii. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 9. 10.

“ spirit—*That the gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and*
 “ *of the same body, and partakers of his promise in*
Christ, by the gospel; whereof he was made a mi-
 “ *nister, that he should preach among the gentiles*
 “ *the unsearchable riches of Christ. And to make*
 “ *all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery,*
 “ *which from the beginning of the world, hath been*
 “ *hid in God—to the intent, that now might be*
 “ *known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of*
 “ *God.*”

In another place (*f*), the same apostle speaks of
 “ *this mystery, which had been hid from ages, and*
 “ *from generations, but then was made manifest to his*
 “ *saints; to whom God would make known what*
 “ *are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the*
 “ *gentiles.*”

Again, in his epistle to the Romans (*g*), he says,
 “ I would not, brethren, that *ye should be ignorant*
 “ *of this mystery; that blindness in part is happened*
 “ *to Israel, until the fulness of the gentiles be come*
 “ *in.*” And referring to the same matter, in the
 close of the same epistle (*h*), he speaks of “ the
 “ *mystery which was kept secret since the world*
 “ *began, but then was made manifest, and by the*
 “ *scriptures of the prophets, according to the com-*
 “ *mandment of the everlasting God, made known to*
 “ *all nations, for the obedience of faith.*”

The

(*f*) Coloss. i. 26. 27.

(*g*) Rom. xi. 25.

(*h*) Rom. xvi. 25. 26.

The mysteries here spoken of were neither abstruse nor unintelligible; their *hidden* meaning was not reserved for the "*initiated*," and withheld from the "*profane*;"—nor were they considered as speculations proper to employ the learned, and keep the vulgar in awe. But they were plain and level to every capacity (*i*). The apostle speaks of his *own knowledge* in the *mystery of Christ*; and desires *that all his brethren* might be as great "*adepts*" in it as himself (*k*). They had a moral and practical use; were *made known* for the *obedience of faith* (*l*), not to exercise their faith *only*—to promote piety and virtue, not wrangling and disputation.

In all other places of scripture, when the word mystery is used, without any particular allusion to the calling of the gentiles, it signifies the power, mercy, and goodness of God, vouchsafed to the whole race of mankind; and wonderfully displayed in the dispensation of the gospel; a blessing so inconceivably great and unexpected, that it might well appear mysterious, till the whole plan of it was laid open, and fully made known.

Thus, in that passage of St. Paul (*m*), "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness;
" God

(*i*) Ephes. iii. 4. (*k*) Rom. xi. 25. (*l*) Ib. xvi. 25. 26.

(*m*) 1 Tim. iii. 16. But the true meaning of 1 Tim. iii. 16. is according to many old versions, and the opinion of Sir Isaac Newton, *μυστα εστι το της ισοειδους*

μυστηριου

“ God was made manifest in the flesh.” It does not mean that God himself was visible in the person of Christ—this would not have been a mystery, but an impossibility: “ For no man hath seen God at any time. nor *can* see him (*n*):” But it signifies, that the power, mercy, and goodness of God, which is all that we can know of him, were rendered conspicuous in the person of Christ, who was the agent and instrument of the Almighty, in his beneficent designs towards the children of men,—so that the Supreme Being might be said to be *manifested*, when he made known his will to Christ, and gave him power and authority to execute it; and is what our Lord repeatedly declares: “ My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me (*o*).” “ I can, *of mine own self*, do nothing (*p*).” Again, when speaking of the resurrection of the dead, and the great and sudden change which our bodies were to undergo, St. Paul says, “ Behold I shew you a mystery:” (1 Cor. xv. 51.) i. e. I make known to you a circumstance, relating to an event, the particulars of which you before were unacquainted with.

And to put it past doubt, that all the mysteries of the gospel came within the province of reason, and
common

μυστηριον ο εφανερωθη εν σαρκι. *That which* was manifest, *o, id quod*, i. e. the mystery, that series of events disclosed by the gospel.

(*n*) John i. 18. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

(*o*) John vii. 16.

(*p*) John v. 30.

common apprehension of mankind, he supposes a case, where all of them are brought together, and yet possible to be conceived. " Though I *understand all mysteries* and all *knowledge* (q). i. e. every thing that relates to the dispensation of the gospel, and a proper ability to preach it. Here it is observable, that *mystery* and *knowledge* go hand in hand; a connection peculiar to those of the gospel,—in all others they are very wide asunder; for the *less* the *knowledge*, the *greater* the *mystery*; till the proportion being not at all kept up between them, knowledge is wholly lost and sunk in the labyrinths and abyfs of mystery.

These instances adduced from the scripture will suffice to prove, that there are no *mysteries* in the gospel but such as are *revealed*. That they relate in general to the calling of the gentiles, to partake of God's mercy in the gospel. That they did not consist of abstruse and contradictory propositions, of so wonderful a nature as to confound the reason, and stagger the faith of the believer—but plain and important truths, containing an account of God's will *made known* to mankind, by the preaching of Christ and his apostles.

Which leads me, secondly, to consider, That when the gospel is said to be mysterious, the true nature of it is misrepresented.

E 2

It

(q) 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

It is not without good reason, that the scripture always represents it under the image of *light*—as “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (*r*).” “I am the *light* of the world (*s*),” says our Lord; “He that followeth me, shall not walk in *darkness*, but shall have the light of life (*t*).” Christians are said to be “*children of light*, and of the day (*u*);” and they are told, “to *believe* in the *light* (*x*).” What can these strong expressions mean, but that the gospel proposes so plain and clear a rule of faith, that it cannot be mistaken by those who will use the faculties which God has given them?—That it is as obvious to the reason of mankind, as light is to the eyes. Indeed, so clear is it represented, that emphatically speaking, it is styled *light itself*. And it was wisely and beneficently ordered, by the Almighty, that the gospel should be thus plain and intelligible; as it was intended for general use, and more particularly for the poor and illiterate (*y*). Any thing intricate or abstruse, would have ill-suited their capacities, who are not to be instructed by abstract propositions, but self-evident truths: It was therefore meant to serve as a clear and practical rule of life—not a standard for doubtful disputations, or speculative

(*r*) John i. 9. (*s*) Ib. viii. 12. (*t*) Luke xvi. 8.

(*u*) 1 Theff. v. 5. (*x*) John xii. 36.

(*y*) Matt. xi. 5. Luke iv. 18.

speculative opinions. It is for this reason that St. Paul says, "If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not—lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." Vice and wickedness are enemies to all reformation—and the light shines in vain upon those who willfully shut their eyes against its brightness. That the doctrines of it perfectly agree with this description, and are as plain as they are important, will appear from a short review of them.

The first great design, was to call men's attention to the true object of worship, and the duty which he requires of them; and it expressly teaches, "the only true God" is "the Father (*z*);" and that he is to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth (*a*)."

Mankind was almost wholly sunk in vice as well as ignorance—the gospel was therefore a summons to them "to repent (*b*)," and return to their duty, to their heavenly Father; to reclaim them from sin and wickedness—to a life of holiness and virtue; and to assure them of pardon and forgiveness, upon their conversion and amendment (*c*).

And, as an encouraging motive to perseverance in well-doing, the promise of eternal life is held forth

E 3

to

(*z*) John xvii. 1, 3.(*a*) Ib. iv. 23.(*b*) Mark vi. 12.(*c*) Acts iii. 19.

to them as a reward of their obedience (*d*). This doctrine of a resurrection, and future judgment, before but obscurely known, was plainly discovered and *brought to light* by the *gospel* (*e*);” and the evidence given of it, by the resurrection of Christ, afforded the fullest assurance of the certainty of our own (*f*).

These are the *fundamental* doctrines of christianity, in which there is nothing dark or *mysterious*; nothing that revolts the common reason or sense of mankind; nothing to provoke the scoffs of the infidel, or to give offence to the rational and true believer. But can the same be said of that form of religion, which has been falsely exhibited under the name of christianity; which has involved the plainest truths in *mystery*, and instead of affording *light*, has led to more than *Egyptian darkness*; that has increased the merit of faith, in proportion to the weakness of its credibility; and requires, that men should cease to be reasonable creatures, in order to become religious ones. What a perversion of the gospel is this! to turn, what is there called a *revelation*, into an inscrutable *mystery*, and to make what is unintelligible, a criterion of the true faith! But this comes by introducing doctrines, and modes of belief, which we shall in vain look for in the scripture; and when once brought in, the advocates for
them,

(*d*) John v. 29. Rom. ii. 7.

(*e*) 2 Tim. i. 10. (*f*) 2 Cor. iv. 14.

them, in order to give them greater credit, have always represented to the people, that the very being, and essence of christianity, depended upon them; when, neither the doctrines, nor the terms by which they express them, have any place in the sacred writings; but evidently came in, with the heathen philosophers, upon their conversion: who were fonder of making a shew of their learning, than of their religion. Thus, for want of acquiescing in what the Almighty has been pleased to reveal of himself and his will, christianity has appeared in such a dress, as has entirely disguised her; and an intricate, artificial theology, has been substituted for the pure and plain word of God.

Having shewn from the scripture, that there are no mysteries in the gospel but such as are revealed; and that when it is said to be mysterious, the true nature of it is misrepresented; I shall make a few reflections upon what has been said, and conclude.

First. It was St. Paul's opinion—That “to *make known* the *mysteries* of the *gospel*, was all that was necessary to gain it a reception in the world.

And if *all other mysteries* were as capable of a rational explanation, as those of the gospel, the principal objection now made against it would be removed.

He thought too—that liberty of speech, was the only means of advancing the truth; and that to discuss freely the mysteries of the gospel, was the duty
of

of a christian minister ; that *he* should *open his mouth boldly*, and explain them all ; which was as much as to say, that there were none in it, or at least none that did not admit of the plainest interpretation,—a declaration which no one should be afraid of making, though the same fate awaited him that did the apostle, and he should *be in bonds* likewise. It is superstition only that wants the support of penal laws. Truth is ever a gainer by discussion and free enquiry.

Secondly. Those who maintain, that the most sacred and fundamental parts of christianity are *mysterious* and *incomprehensible*, cannot help acknowledging, that where these characters are found, there the essentials are preserved, which constitute the idea of a *true church*. Thus the church of Rome itself, with all her corruptions, is intitled to this appellation, and with great justice too, as *she* had a prior right to them, by having had the merit of introducing them before others did. But instead of priding themselves upon these distinctions—they would all do well to consider, whether, instead of their being marks of a *true church*, they are not the specific tokens of an *antichristian one*. The prophet has given the leading feature in his description of her, which is so prominent, that it cannot be mistaken : “ Upon her forehead was a name written, “ *mystery* ; Babylon the great—the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth.” It was the foremost character in the list that led the way for all the other corruptions ; and
indeed

indeed what else can be expected from so great a perversion of the human intellect, as to confound the ideas of the plainest things, and deface that reason, the image of God, with which both his word, and his works, are all of them stamped.

Lastly. If unbelievers are ever to be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth; it must be by proposing it in that plainness and simplicity, with which we see it taught in the sacred writings. It has been the insisting upon irrational doctrines, and unscriptural modes of faith, as *necessary to salvation*, which has produced that infidelity we so often hear complained of. For the representing, as the word of God, what appears to be unworthy of its divine author, is the only way to make the truth itself rejected, on account of the corruptions which are said to be a part of it.

Whatever therefore renders religion more rational, renders it more credible—and an appeal to the reason and understanding of mankind, for the truth, excellence, and purity of the gospel precepts, would do more towards recommending them to their belief and practice—than all the creeds and articles that ever were devised—not to convince, but to puzzle and perplex them.



THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE
OF
ATONEMENT.

THE
FUTURE DOCTRINE



1 TIM. ii. 6.

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

TO form just conceptions of the Supreme Being, and his moral perfections, is of the greatest importance to our religious conduct. When he is considered as the original cause and author of all good, he becomes the sole object of our love, adoration, and praise; and we have every motive that can encourage us in the performance of our duty to him. But, if we divest him of the attributes of mercy and goodness, and consider him as partial in his favour, rigid in his decrees, and implacable in his nature—then fear takes place of love, and religion degenerates into superstition.

Under such impressions as these, many are led to believe, that the Deity could not have been rendered *propitious* to his sinful creatures, without the interference of some other being of equal dignity with himself, who gave full satisfaction to offended justice, and thus made way for mercy and forgiveness. And

it has been thought, that Christ was that person, who, by interposing, stayed the wrath of heaven, and averted the impending punishment; and that he did this by becoming a *sacrifice*, and suffering in *their room*,—that by his death, he might *expiate* their offences, and pay the price of that *ransom*, which alone could *redeem* them from sin and misery.

These misapprehensions and unworthy notions of the Supreme Being, proceed from attending to the sound, rather than the sense, of scripture; and adhering to a literal meaning, where the writer intended a figurative one should be understood. But the words preceding the text, will admit of no misconstruction, and inform us, that *God himself* is the prime and original author of our salvation; and is therefore emphatically stiled *our Saviour (a)*; who, from no other consideration, but his own sole mercy and goodness, was desirous (*b*), “that *all men* should be saved, and come unto the knowlege of the truth;” and, that the “*one God (c)*” and Father of all, appointed “*the man Christ Jesus (d)*” as the medium through whom his merciful designs were to be conveyed, and “his will (*e*)” made known to the sons of men; which “mediator,” and instrument, after having *devoted* his life to the service of God,
and

(a) 1 Tim. ii. 3.

(b) 1 Tim. ii. 4.

(c) 1 Tim. ii. 5.

(d) 1 Tim. ii. 5.

(e) 1 Tim. ii. 4.

and the good of mankind, closed the last scene of it, by sealing the truth of his divine mission with his blood. By thus dying in the cause of truth and virtue, he left a (*f*) *testimony to his own times*, which afforded the fullest conviction of it; according to the figurative language of the text, "He gave himself a ransom (*g*) for all, to be testified in due time." That is, his death was a confirmation of that gospel, the doctrines of which, if obeyed, would *free* and *set at liberty*, all those who were under the power and influence of *sin*, and restore them to the favour of God.

In the following discourse I shall, *First*, Endeavour to prove, That all our spiritual blessings in the gospel are derived from the sole goodness, *mercy*, and favour of *God*, as the original cause and author of them. And,

Secondly, That those terms in scripture, which seem to imply the contrary, were well understood by the *Jews*, to whom alone they were addressed; and as such, that they do not apply to *us*, unless we in-

F 2

terpret

(*f*) μαρτυριον καιροis ιδιοis.

(*g*) λυτρον, αντιλυτρον, απολυτρωσις, words of similar import, and signifying *freedom* or *deliverance*; and is so translated, Heb. xi. 35. λυτροσμαι—to *make free*, or *set at liberty*. Luke xxiv. 21. ημεις δε ηλπιζομεν οτι αυτος εις, ο μελλων λυτρουσθαι τον Ισραηλ, made them free, or set them at liberty from the Roman yoke.

terpret their meaning in the same figurative manner they did.

First, That it is from God alone that we derive every blessing we enjoy, is a dictate of nature as well as revelation. The *works* of God universally proclaim this truth, and his *word* is in perfect harmony with it.

The characters, under which the Almighty is constantly described in the Old Testament, are those of a Being merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and *abundant in goodness* and truth (*b*).

The same are recorded in the New, though in more exalted strains. St. Paul (*i*) “magnifies the *goodness* of God, who is rich in mercy, through his great love, wherewith he loved us;” and says, “the kindness and love of God our *Saviour towards man*, appeared” in this respect, most conspicuous, that it was not procured by our *righteous works*, but according to *his own mercy*, *He* hath saved us (*k*). But St. John, not content with this description, as falling short of his idea of the divine benignity, styles him *love itself* (*l*); and says, “that it was manifested in this instance by sending his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him (*m*).”

Such clear and undisputed passages of scripture, sufficiently establish these important truths, “That
God

(*b*) Exod. xxxiv. 6. 7.

(*i*) Eph. ii. 4.

(*k*) Tit. iii. 4. 5.

(*l*) 1 John iv. 8.

(*m*) 1 John iv. 9.

God is essentially, and in his own nature *good*.”
 “ That it is from his *own great love towards mankind* (*n*), that all the blessings of the gospel are derived.” “ It was *his own mercy*, and no other that hath *saved* us.” It was the *love of God* that was manifested, by *sending* Christ into the world, that we might obtain eternal life (*o*) through his instructions ; who “ came not to do his own will (*p*), or to act by his own authority, but his who sent him.” He had no share in the design, but was God’s agent and instrument in the execution of it. “ He came not *of himself*, but *he* sent him (*q*).” He acknowledges too, that the character of *goodness*, in the most unlimited sense, was appropriate to *God* only, in exclusion of himself, and all other beings ; “ Why callest thou *me* good, says he, there is none good but *one*, that is God.” He could not have expressed himself thus, had he been conscious that it was through any *merit* of his own, that the blessings of the gospel had been procured ; and that without such exertion, they could never have been obtained. The mercy of God, which is his goodness to sinners, would not have been so commended, if, without his

F 3

interference

(*n*) *φιλανθρωπια*. Tim. iii. 4.

(*o*) *δι’ αὐτοῦ*—by his Ministry. See Acts ii. 22,—
 not *δι’ αὐτον*, for *his sake*, on *his account*.

(*p*) John v. 30. 43.

(*q*) Ibid. viii. 42.

interference, justice must have taken its natural course, and mankind for ever have been the melancholy victims of it. If such a doctrine as this had been true, he would never have told us, that we should “love the Lord our God, with *all our heart*, with all our soul, and with all our strength (r).” because in this case, an equal, if not a larger portion of our affection would have been due to *himself*.

These declarations of Christ and his Apostles, incontestibly prove, that God is the author of all good; and that our *salvation* in the gospel ought to be ascribed to him, as the prime and original cause of it.

I shall, *Secondly*, endeavour to shew, that those terms in scripture, which seem to imply the contrary, were well understood by the Jews, to whom alone they were addressed; and as such, that they do not apply to us, unless we interpret their meaning in the same figurative manner they did.

The blessings which mankind have received through the ministry of Christ, in the gospel, are often expressed in such terms as *seem* to imply, that the means which he used, were of so prevailing an efficacy, that without them the favour of God could never have been obtained.

Thus he is said “to give his life a *ransom* for many (s);” “to give himself *for* us, that he might

(r) Mark xii. 30.

(s) Ib. x. 45.

might *redeem* us from all iniquity (*t*).” And christians are said to be “ *redeemed* with the precious blood of Christ (*v*),” “ to be *bought* with a price (*w*),” “ to be *purchased* to God by his blood (*x*).”

A manifest reason may be assigned for the use of such expressions as these. It is language borrowed from the Jewish scriptures. The privileges, honours, and distinctions, which the Jews were favoured with, under their dispensation, were all expressed by these terms. And if it be considered that the gospel was first preached to Jews, it is easy to imagine, that the ministers of it would, in order to recommend it, adopt such language as was not only familiar to them, but use the very terms by which they expressed those privileges they so highly valued; that by contrasting the advantages of christianity, with the law of Moses, they might more readily embrace the offer they had to make them.

Thus, the Jews being frequently described as a people who were *ransomed* (*y*), *redeemed* (*z*), *bought*,
purchased,

(*t*) Tit. ii. 14. (*v*) 1 Pet. i. 17. 18. 19.

(*w*) 1 Cor. vi. 4. (*x*) Rev. v. 9.

(*y*) Isaiah xxiii. 3. I gave Egypt for thy *ransom*, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

(*z*) Exod. vi. 6. I will *redeem* you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: λυτρωσομαι υμας, ὡς βραχίονι ἐξήλω, καὶ κρίσει μεγάλῃ, the word used by Luke xxiv. 21.

purchased, and *saved*, the same terms are used as equally applicable to christians.

But it is not to be imagined that the Jews understood them in a *literal* sense, viz. that any *price* was actually paid for their *ransom*, *deliverance*, or *purchase*. Nor had they any idea that there was any other agent concerned in the business, besides the Almighty himself.

Buying is used metaphorically in scripture, and the prophet Isaiah explains its meaning, by applying it to that attention which ought to be paid to his instructions (a).

In this sense, we *buy*, when we seriously apply our minds to study, and receive the precepts of divine wisdom. We are exhorted by Solomon to *buy the truth* (b). Thus the most high God is also said to *buy*, with respect to his creatures. He *buyeth* a people when he interposes in their favour, and employs all proper means to *free* them from sufferings, or any other circumstances of wretchedness, and to raise them to a happy and prosperous state. So he *purchased* or *bought* the children of Israel, by bringing them out of the slavery of Egypt, to the liberty and privileges of Canaan, by his mighty power, wisdom, and goodness; which may be considered as the *price*, improperly so called, for which he *bought* them (c).

That

(a) Isai. lv. i. 3.

(b) Prov. xxiii. 23.

(c) See Taylor's Key to the Epistles.

That these terms were not meant to be taken in a *literal* sense, is plain from what St. Peter says to the jewish converts (*d*), “ forasmuch as ye know ye
 “ were not *redeemed* (set at liberty, or made free from
 “ sin) with corruptible things, as silver or gold
 “ (i.e. there was a price *paid to purchase* your re-
 “ *demption*, or deliverance from sin), but with the
 “ precious blood of Christ:” which, simply considered, as a mere fluid, could have no more value than those *corruptible things* he had before mentioned. But when meant to denote the death of Christ, it had real worth; as *that* was the highest confirmation of the truth of the gospel; which was the charter that freed men from sin, and enjoined them the practice of righteousness; and when connected with his resurrection, was an additional motive and argument for their diligently considering and faithfully regarding that gospel which he preached. In this view of it, it is with great propriety they are said to be redeemed by his blood or death. What confirms this sense of the word *redemption* is this: the Apostle says, it came from the *appointment of God*, and was intended to produce a belief in *him*, and dependance upon his promises in the gospel—of whose design and counsel Christ was made the agent and minister (*e*);
 “ who verily was *fore-ordained* before the foundation
 “ of the world, but was manifest in these last times,
 “ for

(*d*) 1 Pet. i. 18. 22.

(*e*) Ibid. i. 20. 21.

“ for you who, *by him*, do believe in God, that
 “ raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory,
 “ solely for this purpose, *that your faith and hope*
 “ might be *in God*,” and no other.

The blood of Christ, therefore, may be considered as *precious*, and christians to be *redeemed* by it. But the Apostle, by directing their faith and hopes to God, the original author of their redemption, sets aside every other dependance, as being only the means used to effect it, and not the cause of it : For, had there been any real *merit* in the blood of Christ, simply considered, the benefit of which christians might have applied to themselves, any actual *satisfaction* made by it, to the justice of God, for the sins of mankind, or any *purchase* literally paid for their *redemption*, the Apostle would have drawn a very different conclusion—and would have led those “ *who believed in God*,” not “ to place their *faith and hope in Him*,” which is the natural consequence of such a *belief*, but to have reposed it all in Christ ; a doctrine totally opposite to what he has advanced. What has been said of *ransom*, *redemption*, and *purchase*, is equally applicable to the terms *sacrifice* and *atonement*.

The use of them was familiar to the Jews, and applied by the apostles to the converts of that nation. But they were not understood by them in the strictly literal sense which is now affixed to them, viz. as expiations for any breach of the moral law.

Sacrifices

Sacrifices were effectual only in removing *legal defilements*, and in qualifying the worshipper to appear before God in the temple. By this offering he became *purified*; he effected a temporary reconciliation with God, and was so far restored to his favour as to be admitted into his presence, to offer up his prayers there. But, as St. Paul says, “ They could not make him that did the service, perfect, as pertaining to the conscience (*f*).” This sort of purification, is translated by *making atonement* (*g*), in a sense widely different from what we use it, and is to be met with but once in the New Testament (*h*): and should there have been rendered *reconciliation*, as the Greek word is in other places. If sin and guilt could have been literally expiated for, it would not have been required of the Jews “ *to make an atonement for the altar*” as well as for those who were to make their oblations upon it.

As under the law, there was no proper atonement for sin, it is not likely that the Apostles, when speaking to Jewish converts, should use these sacrificial terms in a stricter sense, than they had been before.

But

(*f*) Heb. ix. 9.

(*g*) Exod. xxix. 36. Και το μυσχαριον το της αμαρτιας ποιησεις τη ημερα του καθαρισμου, και καθαριεις το θυσιαστηριον εν τω αγιαζειν σε επ αυτο, και χεισεις αυτο, ωσε ανιασαι αυτο.

(*h*) Rom. v. 11.

But knowing their attachment to these rites, it is highly probable that they should apply them in a better, though a figurative sense, to the truths of the gospel.

Thus it is said, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where there is a perpetual allusion to Jewish customs (*i*), “ that almost all things are by the law
 “ *purged with blood*, and without shedding of blood
 “ there is no remission ; it was therefore necessary,
 “ that the patterns of things in the heavens, should
 “ be purified with these, but the heavenly things
 “ themselves with better sacrifices than these. For,
 “ in the end of the dispensations, Christ hath ap-
 “ peared to *put away sin*, by the *sacrifice of himself*.”

This language would have been perfectly unintelligible to any other than Jews, but to them it denoted the superiority of the gospel above the law, which was the professed design of the whole Epistle. Not that they understood any part of it in a literal sense, as if Christ was to *put away their sins*, without their forsaking them. Very far from it, the true nature of this *sacrifice* is explained a few verses before, where (*k*) “ the *blood* of Christ is said to *purge* their *conscience* from dead works, to *serve* the living God.” All the efficacy of it was in promoting an entire reformation of life and manners, as a previous qualification to their becoming *the true worshippers of the living*

(*i*) Heb. ix. 22. 27.

(*k*) Ibid. ix. 14.

living God. The whole life indeed of Christ, and every act of it, was an entire oblation to God—to serve the best interests of mankind in this and another world, he became a *sacrifice*, he *devoted* himself wholly to the cause of truth and virtue—it was a life of obedience to the will of God, and to comply with that will, and not his *own* (1), “he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (m).”

The principle which actuated him, in his regard to mankind, ought to influence *us*, if occasion should call it forth. “Hereby perceive we love, “because he laid down his life for us, and we ought “to lay down our lives for the brethren (n).” *We* may copy his bright example—be imitators of his love, and make an offering on the altar of friendship (o). But in no sense can either he, or ourselves, be said to have been *real sacrifices* to it.

What confirms the interpretation here given of the several passages on which the doctrine of *atonement* is built, is this—That the terms which seem to favour it, are all borrowed from the *jewish* scriptures—are applied to remove *jewish* prejudices, and accommodate a new doctrine to old conceptions: that, on this account, they are used only in epistles, addressed to converts of that nation—that where the plain principles of christianity are taught, no notice is taken

(1) Luke xxii. 42.

(m) Phil. ii. 8.

(n) 1 Ep. John iii. 16.

(o) John xv. 13.

taken of them, of which there remains a strong proof, that there is only one passage (*p*) in the history of the apostles preaching, where mention is made of them; and as that is to the *elders and overseers* of the church, who were probably jewish converts, it admits of the same general solution with the first: from which it follows, that those *phrases*, however applicable they might be to the Jews, have no relation at all to us, unless we understand them in the same figurative sense they did.

I shall make a few brief remarks upon what has been said, and conclude.

First, Great as the benefits are which we derive through the mediation of Christ—highly as we may think, and we cannot think too highly, of his perfect character and complete example, yet all this must be ultimately referred to the glory of *God the Father*, whose messenger he was, and whose gracious designs he came to execute; on which account God, and not Christ, must ever be considered as the original author of our salvation.

Secondly, As christianity is a scheme to promote piety and virtue, we must be aware of any doctrine that would relax the principles of morality; and teach us to rely upon the merit and good actions of another, for that reward which we shall be entitled to, only for our own personal obedience.

Lastly,

Lastly, In our interpretation of scripture, that axiom cannot be too strictly adhered to, of explaining such passages as are abstruse and difficult, by those which are clear and cannot be mistaken—and, we should remember, that whatever contradicts our first and genuine notions of the moral perfections of God, is a construction that ought not to be admitted, and consequently, that the punishing the innocent for the crimes of the guilty, or the rewarding the wicked for the righteousness of the just, is such a violation of equity, as can be no part of his moral dispensations.



T H E
PLACE, OBJECT, AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
CONSIDERED.

PREACHED AT THE
ARCHDEACON'S VISITATION,

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SECOND EDITION.



ST. JOHN iv. 23.

The Hour cometh, and now is, when the true Worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

THE subject of conversation between our Lord and the woman of Samaria, turned upon these points ; namely—" Where the place of worship ought to be—who the proper object of it was—and in what manner He is to be known, and ought to be worshipped." Upon these topics I propose to enlarge in the following discourse.

I. The woman, as soon as she found the person she was talking with was a Prophet, puts a question to him, relating to the place of worship. " Our Fathers," says she, " worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She does not plead the command of God to justify this custom, but merely ancient usage, and the right of prescription—" Her fathers worshipped there ;" and that circumstance was a rule to them sufficient to supersede all other.

The

The Samaritans did not want means of information in this particular. One of the priests, who had been carried away from Samaria, was sent to dwell amongst them, purposely to teach them, "How they should fear the Lord." From him they must have learned that Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship. But when a people have been long attached to superstitious rites and ceremonies, custom and prejudice have more force than truth and reason; and the circumstance of "their fathers having worshipped in that mountain," had power to prevail even over divine authority.

The reply which our Lord makes to her, is "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in the mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." She who had been used to think that there was something sacred in particular places, and that prayers offered up in them had a particular efficacy, is here told, that even the Temple service at Jerusalem would soon cease, and that the worship of "the Father" would be confined neither to that place nor to the mountain in Samaria; but in whatever part of the world there were true worshippers, the Father would condescend to be adored. The earth is the Lord's, and all that dwell therein. No spot so solitary and concealed, but that a private worshipper might thence acceptably pray to, and praise his Creator, if his mind were in a proper frame. The disposition of his heart would sanctify
his

his devotions, and not the place in which he offered them.

II. If the Samaritans were very zealous about the place from whence they were to prefer their prayers, they were at the same time equally ignorant of the Being, to whom they ought to address them. "Ye worship," says our Lord, "ye know not what." They were not entirely without a knowledge of God; nor did they wholly neglect his worship; but they associated other deities with him, and suffered them to share in their adorations. This appears in their history. "Then one of the priests came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord. Howbeit, every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places, which the Samaritans had made: so they feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence (a). This species of idolatry is expressly forbidden in the scripture. "I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory I will not give to another, neither my praise to graven images (b)."

And what rendered this practice most culpable in them, was, that they neither followed the light of nature, nor the instructions of the priest, who had been sent to teach them. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God," but divided their duty between Him and other beings, which their
ancestors

(a) 2 Kings xvii. 28.

(b) Isa. xlii. 8.

ancestors had deified, and thus fell into the most senseless idolatry.

Such must be ever the case : for when once that primary idea, of One Almighty Father of the Universe, is given up, there is nothing so absurd and shocking which ignorance and folly may not adopt. How cautious then ought men to be, in admitting sentiments at all derogatory from the peerless majesty of Jehovah, as they never fail to lead them into the wildest errors, and inconceivable superstition. And what renders this still more necessary, is, that corruptions in religion are more difficult to remove than any other. An error in worship, however palpable and absurd, and by whatever means it creeps in, is often retained for no other reason, but because it is there already. So much greater veneration is always paid to antiquity, than to truth ! This was exactly the case with the Samaritans ; for we read, “ that
 “ they feared the Lord, and served their graven
 “ images, both their children, and their childrens
 “ children ; as did their fathers, so do they, unto
 “ this day.”

But this ignorance and uncertainty was not to be found amongst the Jews. God had manifested himself to them by the most wonderful evidence of his power, wisdom, and goodness. These divine attributes were all exerted, to give them a clear and perfect knowledge of their duty to Him. “ He
 “ showed his ways unto Moses, his works unto
 “ the

"the children of Israel." And we repeatedly read, what was intended by this display of the attributes of God; that they might impress a devout and lasting idea of his unity and supremacy; "that they might know that the Lord he is God, and that there is none else beside him."

We find our Lord also, during the whole of his ministry, adhering to this fundamental principle of his national religion. His repeated and fervent acts of prayer are recorded in scripture, and the object to whom he preferred it, is most clearly ascertained. He has left us not only his own example for our imitation, but a most comprehensive form of words for our use and direction. The great being, to whom He offered these addresses, was one, and the same. He never varied from the object, nor taught his countrymen to adore any other than HIM, to whom they had been accustomed. When he poured forth praises and thanksgivings, they were uttered in this strain, "I thank Thee, *O Father*, Lord of Heaven and Earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them into babes." When he meant to express his submission to the divine will, and his readiness to fulfill the purposes of his mission, he made use of these words: "*O my Father*, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." Agreeably to his own practice, He taught his disciples, "Pray to *thy Father*,
" which

“ which is in secret, and *thy Father*, who seeth in
 “ secret, shall reward thee openly. Use not vain
 “ repetitions, for *your Father* knoweth what things
 “ ye have need of before ye ask him.” The apostles
 followed his example, and taught the same doctrine.
 “ For this,” says St. Paul, “ I bow my knees unto
 “ *the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ ; giving
 “ thanks always for all things to God, even the
 “ *Father (c).*” And, that both our Saviour and
 his Apostles looked up for succour, to One and
 the same Almighty Being—the great parent of the
 Universe, the Father of mankind—appears from
 these words of our Lord, “ Go to my brethren,
 “ and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and
 “ your Father, and to my God, and to your
 “ God (*d*).” The same truth the apostle Paul af-
 ferts to his heathen converts:—“ Though there be
 “ a multiplicity of deities, and imaginary beings,
 “ that are called Gods, whether in Heaven or in
 “ earth ; to us Christians, there is but One God---
 “ the Father---of whom are all things, and we by
 “ him (*e*).”

The bare recital of these texts, is sufficient to
 establish their meaning. That they should ever
 have been mistaken or misapplied, is the wonder.
 For they are no less agreeable to the natural notions
 of

(*c*) Ephes. iii. 14. 20.

(*d*) John xx. 17.

(*e*) 1 Cor. viii. 5. 6.

of the Deity, than they are to the whole tenor and design of scripture. Yet still, as was the case in St. Paul's time, "There is not in every man this knowledge;" but there might be, if the scripture were the universal rule of faith. This is a plain and easy directory; all other guides, are not only fallible, but more apt to mislead and bewilder, than to give any intelligible information. The bare terms, in which some of them couch their knowledge, are often more abstruse and difficult to be comprehended, than the subject of which they treat. The end too proposed, between these different ways of instruction, is very apparent. The one---"is profitable for doctrine; for reproof; for correction; for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect; thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The other is totally unprofitable; being taken up in barren speculations, which perplex the understanding, without any moral improvement, without planting one virtue in the heart. The surest way, therefore, in our religious concerns, is to adhere to the words of scripture, in every particular; by so doing, we shall become the "true worshippers, who know what we worship; and who worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship *Him*."

We are naturally led to consider, thirdly---the manner in which the Divine Being is to be known, and ought to be adored. Such a revelation of Him-

self and his will, as the Almighty granted to the Jews, had not been vouchsafed to other nations. "He had not dealt so with them, neither had the Heathen such knowlege of his laws." Our Saviour might well affirm to the woman of Samaria, we know what we worship, for salvation is "of the Jews." But we are not here to imagine, that the Jews knew more about the essence, or mode of God's existence, than the Samaritans did. No! this was a secret unfathomable by them both. Their superiority consisted in what, if rightly applied, would have terminated in a practical knowlege of their Maker; in pious affections towards Him; and in dutiful regard to his laws. And wherever, in Scripture, we meet with such an expression, as, "knowing God," or, "the knowlege of God," it is always connected with some moral duty, or revelation of Himself, which is plain and intelligible; and never implies an abstruse notion, or metaphysical idea. David says, "Thou, Solomon, my son, "know" thou the God of thy father, and serve him "with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; "for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if "thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if "thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever (*f*)." Had there been any difficulty in the precept, the father would have explained it to his son;

son; but as he could not fail of comprehending it, he dwells longer upon the duty subjoined; for had he swerved from that, it would have been of fatal consequence; a defect in practice being much more dangerous than an error in the understanding. But the prophet predicts (*g*), that under the Christian dispensation, our "knowledge," and duty to God, would need no comment to make it clear and practicable. "For this is the covenant that I will make
 " with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the
 " Lord, I will put my *laws* into their mind, and
 " write them in their hearts, and I will be to them
 " a God, and they shall be to me a people; and
 " they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and
 " every man his brother; saying, "know" the
 " Lord, for all shall "know" me, from the "least"
 " to the "greatest." And the same prophet (*h*)
 tell us, wherein this knowledge is to be exercised;
 and that it consisted in the proper discharge of the
 relative duties of life. For, speaking of the good
 reign of Josiah, King of Judah, he says, "He did
 " *judgment* and *justice*; he judged the cause of the
 " poor and needy; was not this to "know me,"
 " saith the Lord?" Similar to this, is the whole
 tenor of the gospel: "Hereby do we know, that
 " we know" him, if we *keep his commandments*.
 " Beloved, let us love one another, for *love* is of
 " God, and *every one that loveth*, is born of God,

H 2

" and

(*g*) Jerem. xxxi. 34. (*h*) Jerem. xxii. 15. 16.

“ and “ knoweth” God (*i*).” The object of a Christian’s worship, and the knowlege of God, as far as it relates to any moral and practical purpose, is so clear and plain, that he may with truth affirm, that “ he knows” what he worships. But if the object be multiplied, or if unscriptural terms be used to express it by ; if his faith be perplexed, and his reason confounded, and what ought to be known “ from the “ least to the greatest,” be so mysterious, as to be understood by neither ; then it may be said of him, “ that he worships he knows not what.”

But ignorance and superstition were soon to give way to truth and reason ; and these abuses to be rectified by a reformation, which was then to take place. “ The hour cometh, and now is, says our “ Saviour, when the true worshippers, shall worship “ the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father “ seeketh such to worship Him.” An end was to be put at once to the contention, which had produced such heat and animosity between the Jews and Samaritans. The temple of Jerusalem, and the service in it, which God himself had instituted, was soon to cease ; and all that was to be required, was that men should worship “ the Father, in spirit and in truth.” To do this effectually, there needed neither forms nor ceremonies ; no solemn temples, nor costly victims, but the offering only of a clean hand, and a pure heart. “ Lord, who shall abide in thy

“ thy *tabernacle*? who shall dwell on thy holy hill?
 “ He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righte-
 “ ousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart. He
 “ that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done
 “ evil to his neighbour, and hath not slandered his
 “ neighbour. He that setteth not by himself, but is
 “ lowly in his own eyes, and maketh much of them
 “ that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his neigh-
 “ bour, and disappointeth him not, though it were
 “ to his own hindrance. He that hath not given his
 “ money upon usury, nor hath taken reward against
 “ the innocent; whoso doeth these things shall never
 “ fall.” The worship of this man is acceptable,
 and he it is that frequents the tabernacle of the Lord,
 in spirit and in truth.

Having fully considered the several points, which
 were the subjects of our Saviour’s discourse, with the
 woman of Samaria, I shall make a few remarks upon
 it and conclude.

First, it follows from what has been said, That it
 is to no purpose to be zealous for the place, or cere-
 monies of worship, when the doctrines of it are
 erroneous; much less to plead antiquity for the con-
 tinuance of what ought never to have been admitted.
 For if length of time sanctify abuses, and age make
 error venerable, the church of Rome has a plea to
 urge, which no one that has reformed from her can
 dispute: For in this case, her precedence would be
 her greatest honour. But if there be a church of

still greater antiquity than them all,—“ a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish,” which has truth itself for its author, and salvation for its end, it is the *christian church* we should be zealous for, wherever is its place, and whoever worships in it. Nor need its faithful members ever fear that any danger can befall it. What force or power can assail that fabric, “ which is built upon the foundation of “ the Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief “ corner stone?” The danger is not from without, but within. “ The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” “ But if any man build upon this “ foundation, wood, hay, or stubble; if any man “ debase the scriptures, by adding to them absurdities “ in doctrine, or superstitions in practice, his work “ shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare “ it; because it shall be revealed by fire, and the “ fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

II. Our Saviour has predicted, a reformation would take place in the public worship; and a day would come, “ when the true worshippers, would “ worship the Father, in spirit and in truth.” That this was not done in such purity as it ought, even in the jewish church, which God’s own right hand had planted, appears from the hypocrisy and superstition, with which the Jews were so justly charged. Much less was it done in Samaria, “ where they worshipped “ idols in company with Jehovah.” The progress
that

that divine truth made, during the ministry of Christ and his Apostles is astonishing. The corruptions, however, which soon followed, are too well known to need any remark. "The enemy sowed tares among the good seed," which grew and increased wonderfully. The revival of learning brings us to the æra of the Reformation, when the light of truth broke forth again, and held religion to our view; not indeed clad in her brightest attire, but disgraced with too many of the tawdry ornaments with which christian idolaters had disguised her. Much was then done, but much still remains to be done. That churches, as well as individuals, have not erred, is too much for human frailty to assume. We are "allowed" to say, "that the church of Jerusalem, of Antioch, of Alexandria, of Rome, have erred." And if we do not arrogate to "ourselves" that infallibility, which was the cause of our separation from the latter, "We" may have erred likewise. But if candour will permit us to see our errors, and if we have good sense to correct them, we may be able in time to avoid the fate that now awaits the See of Rome, which is tottering to its very basis, by the weight of its own corruptions. And this we may be assured of, that "God will never suffer his *truth* to fail." For if amidst the general revolt of his own people, who were purposely set apart to worship him, "he reserved unto himself, seven thousand knees, which had not bowed to Baal," will that prophecy

prophecy remain unfulfilled, which expressly says, "that the time was coming, when the "true worshippers should worship the Father in spirit and in truth?"

Lastly,—I have only to add, that we, of this enlightened age and nation, who "make our boast of God, and profess to know his will and approve "the things that are more excellent," that we be careful to let our practice keep pace with our knowledge; that in our belief we "hold fast the faith once "delivered to the saints," which was given to them in a very short summary: "To believe Thee to be the only true God, and Jesus, whom thou hast sent, to be the Christ;" and that in our worship, we be in the number of those, who in the text, are styled "the only true worshippers; who worship the Father "in spirit and in truth." Thus our light will so shine before men, that they will glorify our Father which is in heaven.

To whom be ascribed all honour, power, might, majesty, and dominion, henceforth and for ever.



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